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Local Communities' Involvement in Ecotourism around Tanjung Datu National Park: Potentials and Challenges

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to explore the potentials and challenges of local communities' involvement in ecotourism around Tanjung Datu National Park (TDNP). Using three separate interviews, this qualitative study involved three major entities participated in ecotourism activities around Tanjung Datu National Park (TDNP). Interviews were conducted among the local communities (17 participants) and business owners (7 participants) from two villages located at the vicinity of TDNP namely Kg. Telok Serabang and Kg. Telok Melano, and both local and international tourists (19 participants) who visited TDNP. The findings from the preliminary data indicate that ecotourism around TDNP has indirectly contributed to livelihoods of local communities and there are potentials and challenges in terms of communities' involvement for the tourism-based economy to sustain itself.

Keywords: national park, communities, sustainability, ecotourism, tourists

Introduction

The establishment of national parks has not only been perceived as natural reserves for conservation, but past studies have shown that these national parks can also contribute positively to the growth of local economy through ecotourism (Gandariasbeitia, 2010; Mika, Zawilinska & Pawlusinski, 2015; Nana & Tchamadeu, 2014). Bjork (2000) defines ecotourism as the activities that enable tourists to travel to an area of interest to appreciate, study, and adore nature and